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ABSTRACT

Noting that while laboratory investigations of recordings of children's spontaneous verbal creations or repetitions of traditional forms in their natural play habitats have indicated that they do engage in systematic explorations of language structures in their play, this paper points out that there have been no investigations of whether such play, when it occurs in the classroom, follows similar age/stage patterns. The paper then reports the findings of a study that (1) correlated strategies of language play in the classroom with the age/stage patterns of play identified in the literature; (2) explored methods of introducing classroom play, specifically ambiguity and parody; and (3) examined potential problems related to the issues of "spontaneity" and "hostility." The paper concludes that the eight to eleven-year-old children could easily and successfuly detect literal interpretations of figurative expressions and incorporate them in their own language play. (Appendixes contain materials used in the study.) (FL)

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Children's Humorous Language in the Classroom

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Children's Humorous Language in the Classroom

In recent years, certain educators (Cazden, 1974; Hutson, 1980) and linguists (Kavanaugh and Mattingly, 1972) have suggested that the development of linguistic awareness - that is, focus on language structures - needs to be part of the process for the development of literacy. Cazden (p. 30) and Mattingly (p. 141) suggest as well that children's verbal play offers a framework for the stimulation of awareness of language structures and that it can be usefully integrated into elementary language programs. Punning, for example, explores words/phrases identical in sound with different meanings.

Laboratory investigations and analyses of recordings of children's spontaneous verbal creations or repetitions of traditional forms in their play habitats of street and playgrounds indicate that youngsters in the elementary years do, indeed, engage in systematic explorations of language structures in their play. However, there has been no examination of whether such play, when brought under the aegis of an elementary language arts program, follows similar age/stage patterns of play. Further, bringing verbal play into the classroom is generally met with two objections. Cazden points out that there is the danger of fatally eroding the spontaneity of children's efforts by attempting to integrate them into structured classroom activities. (p. 37) Others, teachers especially, point out that much of what the later year's (8-11's) explore is hostile to adults (teachers), peers and/or the school as an institution. Why, they ask, would one invite and even stimulate such behavior in the classroom?

In the description of the naturalistic study which follows, verbal play creations gathered from class groups of children 6 to 11 years of age are analyzed. The purposes of the study were not only to correlate strategies of play in the classroom with age/stage patterns of play identified in the literature, but also to explore methods of introducing classroom play as well as to initiate an examination of potential problems related to the issues of "spontaneity" and "hostility".

Review of Related Research

To establish age/stage patterns of verbal play in the elementary years, the laboratory research of Shultz (1974), Shultz and Pilon (1973), and Shultz and Horibe (1974) is useful. These investigators make the potentially ambiguous aspects of word sounds (Why does the cookie cry? Because its mother was away for [a wafer] so long.) and word meanings (Why are fish so smart? Because they go around in schools.) the focus of their examination of the development of children's appreciation of verbal humor. Strategies of play, they discover, which exploit multiple interpretations of a word, phrase or sound sequence appear to be consistently detected and appreciated by youngsters around eight years of age, i.e., when most youngsters have entered the stage of concrete operations. This type of logical incongruity - logical because the punchline is in some way congruent with the joke premise - characterises the play with riddles or verse of children in the 8-11 age range.

Prior to this, children in the preoperational or transitional stage of intellection appreciate the nonsensical (illogical) aspects of such play. For these youngsters, that cookies might cry and have mothers provides the incongruity. (Shultz, 1974, p. 104)

On the significance of nonsense to the younger ages, Chukovsky (1925/1971) brings to our attention the fact that in many cultures, literature for young children contains what he calls "rhymed topsyturvies" (I'll give you a piece of milk / And a jug full of silk.) (p. 99) As the name implies, the incongruities in these verses derive from the fact that the routine order of things has been violated or reversed. Normal relations between objects and their attributes have been purposely misallied. "The more aware the child is," Chukovsky writes, "of the correct relationship of things, which he violates in his play, the more comical does this violation seem to him" (p. 99).

Recordings of children's spontaneous efforts and their repetition of traditional forms (Opie and Opie, 1959; Sanches and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1976; and McDowell, 1979) confirm these stages of development in humor appreciation and production of the elementary ages. McDowell's collection of riddles produced by Chicano and white children in Austin, Texas, reveal the presence of play with linguistic ambiguities in the output of children of seven and eight. (p. 219-20) The discovery and exploitation of the lexical diversity of words in our language appears to have its roots in the fact that initially children must master the basic linguistic condition that a word name stands for a single class of objects. Subsequent to this, children must come to grips with the seemingly contradictory concept that a word name may be shared by more than one class of objects or experiences, i.e., there are 'schools' of fish and education.

McDowell notes as well that 5's and 6's tend to produce riddles which are straightforward descriptions of aspects of the

child's life (What has five sides? A starfish.). (p. 219-20) He describes the strategy of these descriptive riddles as "an exercise in transparent definition" (p. 35). The child, it appears, is examining the role of language in describing the stuff of the world through a cataloguing of objects and their related attributes.

In their recordings and analyses of children's verbal play, the Opies and Sanches and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett examine instances of parody play which begin to appear in the repertoire of the 8-11 age range:

Mary had a little lamb / Her father shot it dead,
And now it comes to school with her /
Between two chunks of bread. (Opie and Opie, p. 90).

In these productions, the incongruities tend not to derive from an exploitation of linguistic ambiguities. Rather, they derive from the nature of parody which, by definition, ridicules through a close imitation of form while expressing other than usual perspectives of meanings. (Webster's, 1971, p. 1693) In the above version of Mary and her lamb, the four line stanza with its abcb rhyme follows that of the normal versions of these rhymes. The meaning, of course, is designed to shatter sentimental descriptions of experience characteristic of this genre. It is in this area of play that verses which vent hostilities toward friends and enemies alike can be found:

God made the French / God made the Dutch
Whoever made you / Never made much. (Opie and Opie, p. 176)
Teacher, teacher, I declare. / I see someone's underwear.
They're not white. They're not blue.
They's not pink, but they sure do stink.
(Sanches and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, p. 103)

The existence of these verses points both to a pervasive need in children to express their resentments and to the availability of the medium of verbal play to serve this need. (Wolfenstein, 1954/1978 p.168) What one is witnessing in this type of play is precisely the expression of the socially inexpressible. In this view, humorous language has the advantage of reducing " . . . the speaker's responsibility for what he is saying . . ." since the structure of the form (rhyme, meter, etc.) influences choice and sequence of words. (Sanches and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, p. 72)

Parody, though, as its literary history can attest, is often designed as a legitimate means of critiquing experience. In the Opies' collection, elementary children are found exploring these aspects of parody through the construction of verses derived from political events as well as other new and curious elements of experience which characterized the years during and after the second world war. (p. 101-4) Rhymes about Hitler and descriptions of "pre-fabs," flying saucers, and the coronation were prominent among speech play verses of the later elementary years. What should be kept in mind, then, is that parody play need not only explore the lacerating of "friends" -- an aspect of verbal play not to be welcomed in the classroom -- but it can also provide a means for the constructive critiquing of experience.

Collection Procedures

Prior to separate analyses of children's ambiguity and parody play, the investigator describes procedures for stimulating and collecting these play responses. The methodological design of the study is participant observation. During the years of data collection, the investigator knew the subjects by virtue of her

position as curriculum coordinator for teachers and classes of the 6-11 year olds participating in the study. Further, during the collecting sessions, it was she who acted as the teacher-in-charge, introducing the opportunities and guiding the play sessions.

Opportunities for Play

Play with ambiguities. This type of play is defined as the creation of incongruities through exploitation of verbal ambiguities, i.e., the juxtaposition of multiple interpretations for a single word or phrase -- Dress the chicken: caption to a picture of a chicken dressed in socks and shorts.

Series #1: sessions in which children were invited to juxtapose multiple interpretations of a phrase or sentence.

Parody play. This type of play is defined as the creation of incongruities through the transposition of sounds (similar) and meanings (contrasting) of words and phrases in well-known labels/titles -- "The Sik [Six] Million Dollar Man" (Appendix D: Figure A).

Series #2: sessions in which children were invited to use name/labels of products as play material.

Series #3: sessions in which children were invited to use titles (mainly of TV shows) as play material.

There were, then, a total of three separate series to which children of each age group were asked to produce creations similar to models of that type of play.

Play Sessions

In the first session of any series, the investigator met with the entire group. For Series #1, the reading of Amelia Bedelia (Parish, 1963) was the mode of introduction (Appendix A). For the introduction of Series #2 and #3, examples of children's creations

(also referred to as "inventions") collected during a pilot study on humorous language were presented to the children (Appendix A). Following the presentation of the models of a single series, the children were invited to produce their own examples in a group discussion. This kind of sharing is a common procedure in this school. Following the class exchange of possibilities for inventions, the investigator began further explorations with a portion of the group (eight or nine youngsters) while the teacher and the rest of the class engaged in other pursuits.

In each class, the investigator met with the small groups once a week for a period of six to eight weeks or until every child had participated in at least three sessions. The idea was to invite youngsters who might not gravitate to this kind of activity to participate as well as to produce at least two inventions. This was the only "compulsory" aspect of participation in the sessions. These sessions were forty-five minutes in length. During that time children would record their inventions as they emerged. They were asked -- indeed, they were eager -- to record their examples in the same format as the models, i.e., in words and pictures. The visual material functions differently in each of the opportunity types; its contributions to each are described in the analyses of each type. The investigator kept the children's original recordings or made photocopies when necessary. The recordings of the children's responses to each of the three series represent the material analyzed.

The Sample of Children

The population for this investigation consists of children six to eleven years of age who attend a small independent school in New

York City. Regardless of differences in religious or ethnic backgrounds, the children all tend to come from middle-class homes. Moreover, they tend to be bright, active, articulate children who find verbal play a welcome activity to explore. As most teachers can attest, not all children are either ready or able to play with language - especially in the classroom. In this case, the reticent members of each class were unquestionably encouraged by their spirited peers.

In this school, the 6 to 11 year olds are generally divided into four age groups: 6-7's, 8's, 9's and 10-11's. These are the four age groups exposed to each of the three series of play. The inventions were collected over a period of five years (Spring '74 to Spring '79). In Appendix B a chart outlines the patterns of participation (numbers of children and dates of response to each of the three series) of the four age groups.

An advantage of the long collection period is the testing of these general opportunity types with regard to the strength of the stimuli they provide for verbal play. One of the interesting facts of children's culture is that its particular passions and visible notations tend to rise and fall in popularity with a certain rapidity as well as regularity. The Wacky Packs, which were popular during the school year of 1973-74 and which contributed greatly to stimulating early sessions of parody play, not only became unavailable but also receded, as a result, as an expression of spontaneously derived child interest. However, the incongruities which they present continued to provide children with an intriguing as well as powerful motive to play. The same was true of play with verbal ambiguities as represented in Amelia Bedelia.

Ambiguity Play

With these creations, the visual material functions as an integral part of the formulation of an incongruity. When asked to "Dress the chicken," Amelia of Amelia Bedelia puts shorts and socks on it. The instructions were written into the text but Amelia's literal interpretations were presented in pictures. Thus the juxtaposition of multiple meanings for a particular phrase is achieved through the presentation of a verbal description of an idea which is incongruously interpreted in pictures.

Categorizing Responses to Ambiguity Play

Adequate Responses. Major linguistic structures which allow for ambiguity in interpretation are homophony and polysemy. The children's inventions exploiting these structures of language provide examples of adequacy of production.

1. Homophony derives from words/phrases identical in sound but with different meanings. As a source of play, it requires that the inventor juxtapose words identical in sound but with different derivations. Example:

Knight on a horse: caption of a picture of stars and moon on the back of a horse (Appendix D: Figure B)

2. Polysemy derives from the metaphorical extension of the meaning of a word or phrase to describe more than one set of objects or experiences. As a source of play, it requires that the inventor juxtapose multiple, related meanings (often literal and figurative) for a phrase. Examples:

(a) Shop Lifting: caption to a picture of a man balancing a supermarket on his shoulders (Appendix D: Figure C).

(b) I'm up to my ears in papers: caption to a picture of a person's head just visible above a pile of papers.

In constructing these types of incongruities, the inventor must fulfill the following conditions: (a) the definition of two, incongruously related meanings for a single phonetic sequence, and (b) the juxtaposition of these meanings in words and pictures to suggest that each is a legitimate interpretation of the other.

Inadequate Responses. These fall into three categories. Two of these categories derive from the inventors' inability to manage "double-meaning" and "juxtaposition".

1. Double-meaning difficulties are represented in inadequate inventions in which the picture presents a meaning legitimately derived from the caption. Example:

"You're eating up a storm": said by a mother to a child eating from a table laden with food and a storm raging overhead.

2. Non-juxtaposition difficulties are represented in inadequate inventions in which the two meanings are not juxtaposed but presented in the manner of a pictorial lexicon. Example:

Hair and Hare (two pictures): (a) "hair" as a caption to a picture of a girl with long braids; (b) "hare" as a caption to a picture of a rabbit eating a carrot (Appendix D: Figure D)

3. A third category of inadequacy is the reproduction of examples of play used as demonstration material or found in books available to the children. The following example reproduced by a child in the 10-11's group can be found in The King Who Rained (Gwynne, 1970):

Coat of arms: caption to a picture of a jacket made out of human arms.

Findings for Ambiguity Play

Table 1 (Appendix C) charts the number and percentages of adequate/inadequate inventions for each group. The table demonstrates that: (a) there is a dramatic increase in the production of adequate inventions between the 6-7's and the 8's; (b) that the inventions of the 6-7's are predominantly inadequate; and (c) that the inventions of the other groups are predominantly adequate. These results are generally consonant with Shultz's and McDowell's descriptions of children's abilities to play with verbal ambiguity. As noted, in their developmental studies of children's responses to riddles, they found that not until 8 years of age do children begin to consistently appreciate the use of this strategy of play.

Table 2 (Appendix C) tabulates the distribution of responses of each group in the categories of adequacy and inadequacy. By and large, the 6-7's responses are comprised of demonstration material and inventions which reveal an inability to construct a humorous juxtaposition of multiple meanings. The three older groups, on the other hand, demonstrate a marked preference for exploiting polysemous properties - successfully - of words/phrases. In the discussion which follows, the investigator examines implications regarding children's capacities for play derived from these findings.

Discussion of Ambiguity Play

For the 6-7's, it would seem that the quantity of reproductions can be accounted for in terms of appropriateness of response for these ages. In the introductory session, these youngsters thoroughly enjoyed the presentation of Amelia's incongruous interpretations. Since the absurdities are pictorially represented - by

themselves expressions of nonsensical incongruities -- it is unclear to what degree, if at all, the youngsters understand that the incongruities derive from play with linguistic ambiguities. Just as these ages appreciate verbal descriptions which violate normal representations of experience -- that cookies cry and have mothers -- so they find visual depictions of incongruous behavior -- putting shorts on a chicken -- thoroughly delightful. While these inventions cannot be described as adequate creations of linguistic incongruities, they do represent for these ages an adequate expression of appreciation of nonsensical incongruities.

The group of 25 examples wherein the 6-7's do not appropriately juxtapose multiple meanings for a single sound sequence point to other developmental characteristics of these years. The example cited above, in which a pictorial lexicon of the homophonically related words "hair" and "hare" constitutes the "invention," is typical of these responses. In constructing responses derived from homophonic elements of language, the youngsters have changed the activity from one of play with ambiguities to the detection and enumeration of words with identical sounds but different spellings and meanings. What becomes clear is that while the youngest group can discover words representative of these sound/meaning relationships, they are unable to play with these variables. Rather, they appear to be intent upon clarification of the ambiguities. Upon discovery of these word-pairs, the children represented the meanings separately while the word-phrase became the caption. For these children, the opportunity became an exercise in documenting what remains constant - sounds - and what varies - meanings and/or spellings - for certain words and phrases in the language. This

process appears to be consistent with Chukovsky's notion that not until a child is confident of a particular idea is he able to include it in his play repertoire. (p. 99)

Table 2 reveals as well that the major linguistic source of ambiguity for the successful creation of inventions by the three older groups is polysemy. Polysemy derives largely from the metaphorical extension of words or phrases to include more than one class of objects or experiences. These alliances are based on the recognition of perceptual, functional or psychological similarities among the items which receive the same "name." A case in point is the word 'neck'-- there are necks of animals, rivers, plants, tools and even traffic jams are dubbed "bottle-necks"-- wherein perceptual similarities are responsible for the extension of the name to include a variety of "narrow parts joining two other parts" (Webster's, 1511). The sense of metaphorical connections among word meanings fades as constant usage promotes greater and greater differentiation of meaning. With these inventions, as in much of the riddle play for these ages, the children exploit this structure of meaning in language through the "resurrection" of literal meanings of faded metaphors. (McDowell, p. 100)

In this collection of polysemous inventions, then, there is one main strategy for constructing incongruities which juxtapose multiple meanings of words/phrases: the exploitation of defining and/or nondefining attributes of objects/actions which have the same name. Let's take a look at "Shop Lifting." The invention highlights the fact that not only can a word name describe more than one class of actions but, as a result, it must also represent more than one set of attributes:

to lift

(verb transitive)

extension	intension
--to raise	--bringing to a higher position
--to steal (slang)	--taking property from a store

In the invention the extension--to raise--is inappropriately paired with the intension--taking property from a store. Unlike the younger groups wherein children struggle to clarify ambiguities of meaning fostered by polysemy (or homophony), now, youngsters can use their classification skills to deliberately construct incongruous alliances among the extensions and intensions of word-names with multiple, related meanings.

The inventions which derive from polysemous structures give these ages the opportunity to detect, define and juxtapose metaphorically related meanings for a single word or phrase. With this type of play, children begin to differentiate properties of extension and intension of word-concepts. During the elementary years, Anglin (1977) tells us, the child attempts ". . . to consciously formulate the defining properties of his verbal concepts and will increasingly use those defining properties as a basis for categorizing objects" (p. 262). This is an important part of the process of developing linguistic awareness during these years. The construction of incongruous alliances among these properties tends to highlight the usual structural and semantic relations which shape word meanings.

Parody Play

With these opportunities for play, the visual material functions differently than it did in ambiguity play. Here the children's illustrations serve to exploit new meanings introduced by the

invention as seen in the "Sik Million Dollar Man" example. The visual material is not necessary for the exploration of this type of play with incongruity. However, it provides a stimulation for the children to record their responses. Also it provides an opportunity to share with classmates. Moreover, these explorations of incongruity are strengthened by representation in words and pictures.

Categorizing of Responses to Parody Play

Adequate Responses. Adequacy of invention requires the fulfilling of conditions basic to the creation of incongruities, i.e., ". . . the conflict between what is expected and what actually occurs" (Shultz, 1976, 12). With parodies of labels/titles, the expectation of congruence with normal interpretations is set through the sound similarities between the invention and the original. Sound is deceptive, though, as the word-substitutes in the invention present meanings which conflict with usual interpretations. Examples:

(a) Six Million Dollar Man: Sik Million Dollar Man

(b) Wash n' Dry: Wash n' Die

Inadequate Responses. Even though every inventor considered his/her creations humorous, those inventions which do not exemplify play with the above sound/meaning relations of words are categorized as inadequate. Five categories of inadequate parody inventions were identified in the children's output:

1. Play with antonyms in which both sounds and meanings of paired words differ--My-T-Fine: My-T-Bad.

2. Play with synonyms in which sounds of paired words may or may not differ but the meanings are similar--The Love Boat: The Hug Boat.

3. Play with sound only wherein there is no discernible play with meaning--The Phantom Tollbooth: The Shamanton Tollbooth.

4. Reproductions in which one of the investigator's demonstration inventions (or other models of this type of play available to the children) were used--The Happy Days: The Crappy Days.

5. Inventions which were unclassifiable because the original label/title was not provided and could not be discerned from the invention--(no original label): Red Gum (makes your face turn red).

The Findings for Parody Play

How capable, then, is this sample of 6-11 year olds in creating incongruities in parody form? In Table 3 (Appendix C) the numbers and percentages of adequate/inadequate inventions are tabulated for each age group. What Table 3 clearly demonstrates is that these children are quite able to understand and create incongruities which derive from play with words close in sound whose meanings differ. In fact, all age groups favored the verbal strategy defined in the literature as characteristic of incongruities in parody play.

Inadequacy in terms of play with verbal strategies decreases as the children increase in age. With the exception of the 6-7's, in fact, inadequacy does not represent a substantial part of the output. Further, except for 10 synonymous inventions produced by the 9's, the distribution of inadequate inventions is rather even in all of the groups. It should be noted, again, that for the most part these inadequate inventions were certainly considered humorous by the inventors and their classmates and that, in the case of synonyms and antonyms, they represent explorations of linguistically sound structures of meaning in language. Indeed, this kind of diversity in the youngster's creations could be used as a frame for having them

identify and compare sound/meaning relationships of words in the context of their verbal play.

Discussion of Adequate Inventions of Parody Play

Having established that within certain parameters these 6-11 year olds were able to respond rather successfully to this opportunity for play, the researcher took a closer look at exactly what the term "adequate" covers in these parody inventions. The determination of adequacy on the basis of certain formal elements of play - use of words close in sound and different in meaning - offers only one, limited view of the children's productions. What needs to be formulated is a description of patterns of play within the category. The following definition and examples identify the criteria the investigator has selected for evaluating the adequate parody inventions as expressive of either nonsensical or logical incongruities.

Nonsensical parody inventions. These derive from play with words from labels/titles which are close in sound. The substitution of one for another -- a new word for the original -- changes the meaning(s) suggested by the original and results in silly or absurd renditions of these items. Examples:

(a) Wash n' Dry: Wash 'n Die

(b) Skippy Peanut Butter: Skinny Peanut Butter

The emphasis, obviously, in this type of creation is sound play. The substitute or new word must be related phonically to a key word in the original but its meanings must offer only a silly or nonsensical contrast. The inventor, in fact, is simply called upon to find one word out of his/her total lexicon which has some phonological identities to the stimulus word.

Logical parody inventions. These derive from play with words close in sound whose meanings, given the context set by the original, are contradictory to each other. Here, play with word meaning pokes fun by critiquing the original item. Examples:

(a) Six Million Dollar Man: Sik Million Dollar Man

(b) Crest Toothpaste: Crust Toothpaste

As described earlier, the nature of parody is to critique experience by presenting it from incongruous perspectives. This aspect of play is given fuller expression in the logical parodies than the nonsensical ones. "Critiquing" requires specificity of focus. In the case of the logical inventions, formal or functional characteristics of the originals can be contradicted, or, perhaps, actions or reactions associated with an item might be taken to task. In the nonsensical productions, children play with experience by describing it in absurd or ludicrous terms, representations, in fact, which have little or no "play back" to the original item - except similarity of sound of the name-labels. The reader will note, however, from an examination of the demonstration models for this task that both nonsensical and logical inventions are represented. Thus the investigator invited the children to respond with play of either type of parody.

Two significant characteristics regarding age differences in the production of these inventions are revealed in Table 4 (Appendix C). For the younger groups, the creation of nonsensical parodies tends to define the range of play within this type. The older groups, on the other hand, come closer to an equal distribution of inventions between the two types. In the qualitative analyses which follow, the investigator identifies characteristics common

to the productions of the younger groups and to those of the older groups.

Parody inventions--nonsensical--of the younger groups. With their creations of nonsensical incongruities, these ages appear to be not just unable to encode meanings specifically contradictory to those represented by the original. Rather, they seem eager to use the vehicle to explore themes related to the emotional and social adjustments made during these years. The introduction of ideas or images wholly unrelated - except by sound similarities - to the original is of little concern as the youngsters explore what tends to be thought of as forbidden or provocative material. Categories and examples follow:

(a) death/violence

Maxwell House Coffee: Axwell House Coffee (cuts off your head)

(b) scatology

Nancy Drew: Nancy Poo

(c) stupidity

Double Mint Gum: Triple Mint Dumb (makes you dumber everyday)

(d) craziness

Captain Kangaroo: Captain Kookoo

As noted, the aspects of critiquing experiences to be expressed in play with meanings is largely unexplored in the nonsensical parodies. To the extent that the element of "critiquing" has influenced the play of these children, it appears to be understood as a cue to poke fun through the expression of thematic material largely representative of the developmental concerns of these ages. (Wolfenstein, p. 163)

With the younger groups, the issue is less one of adequacy than one related to the appropriateness of this task for these classes. While the children have fulfilled the requirements for adequacy - often in a minimal way - teachers would need to assess whether time spent in these explorations has afforded adequate return in the way of developing children's understanding of aspects of language and humor. It may be that with these ages classroom time is better spent developing children's competence with nonhumorous communication of meaning rather than attempts at parody.

Parody inventions of the older groups. What tends to separate the nonsensical inventions of the older groups from those of the younger groups is the abundance of sound play and consistency in the development of the nonsensical themes. Examples:

(a) Spoon Size Shredded Wheat: Goon Size Shredded Feet (ingredients--bones, toenails, veins, skins)

(b) The Twilight Zone: The Toilet Zone (starring Flush Gordon)

(c) Chock Full O'Nuts (all method grind, for all coffee makers, the heavenly coffee): Sock Full O'Newts (special method rind, not for Cough Makers, the hellishy coffee)

Competence in the development of absurdities as represented here is not found in the younger groups. What is striking about these examples is the delight of these older children in exploring multiple methods for pairing words through the manipulation of their sounds. With these ages, as with the younger groups, phonological patterning continues to guide the process of creation but a greater variety of its possibilities is explored.

Four prototypical examples of inventions of logical parodies by these ages are:

(a) Newlywed Game: Newly Dead Game

(b) Diet Pepsi: Die Pepsi

(c) Sun Kist Oranges: Sun Pissed Oranges

(d) Welch's Grape Juice: Belch's Grape Juice

What are some of the possibilities for playing with meanings of the labels/titles which are explored in these examples? Products offer tangible attributes of form (smell, texture, color, etc.) and function (for eating, to clean with) as well as associations derived from actions or reactions to these items. Thus the label "Diet Pepsi" refers to a particular kind of drink and designates one of its special characteristics -- low in calories. "Die Pepsi" neatly contradicts the enjoyable or healthy reactions which might be derived from imbibing this product through the suggestion that it will bring about death instead.

Turning to examples of play with TV titles, these are frequently descriptive of show content just as product names highlight crucial attributes. The "Newlywed Game" is a show in which recently married couples compete for prizes. The fate of the optimistic newlyweds is swift and fatal in the invention--"Newly Dead Game".

In concluding the analysis of parody inventions, it is important to point out the difficulty of classifying these creations as either "logical" or "nonsensical". "Sun Pissed Oranges" is a case in point. Quite possibly the invention derived from play with sound alone. Once constructed, though, the "new" product can be viewed as having "play back" to the original through the formal attribute of color -- orange -- which characterizes both urine and

orange juice. There is no way of determining whether or not this occured to the creator. Regardless of level of consciousness of play, however, the youngsters in the older groups produced more inventions classifiable as logical parodies than the younger ones.

In general, the parodies deriving from the construction of logical incongruities appear to demonstrate older elementary youngsters' readiness to evaluate aspects of their culture and experiences. Given opportunities to play with name-phrases describing nationally known products and TV shows, youngsters poke fun by taking to task the exaggerations and stereotypic views routinely employed in the promotion of these items. The media's consistent use of hyperbole and euphemism, the mixing of fact and fiction, are not overlocked by these ages. What seems to motivate their parodies is the obvious invitation to degrade items so described.

Finally, let's examine two inventions produced by children in the two older groups which are exemplary of their developing ability to use the parody form to satirize, in these cases, political elements of their experience:

(a) Colgate Dental Cream (MFP, approved by dentists): Watergate Mental Creme (LSD, approved by Nixon)

(b) Green Giant Sauerkraut and Brussel Sprouts: Green Tryant, German Style Sauerkraut and Brussel Crout. (Appendix D: Figure E)

These examples reveal elementary youngsters beginning to use the joking medium (after their adult models) to critique their experience through the construction of incongruous perspectives of political events. These parodies formulate logical incongruities whose meanings derive from those suggested by the labels as well

as point beyond ordinary associations evoked by the original referents.

Hostility and Spontaneity

In bringing parody play to the classroom, the issue of "hostility" is brought to the fore. What teachers would need to think through are the following questions. What kinds of behavior can be handled by a particular group of youngsters? As every teacher knows, groups can differ widely in maturity regardless of age. And, what expressions of play are not either personally offensive or hurtful to members of the immediate community. Silliness in and of itself is not offensive and can be enjoyed by all as long as it doesn't fatally disrupt the pursuing of the subjects at hand. Finally, while certain resentments and/or scapegoating or poking fun in cruel ways represent a kind of behavior present in most elementary age social groups, they should not and cannot be sanctioned by adults. Certainly, verbal play which becomes part of the classroom activities and proceeds with not only the blessing but the active interest of classroom teachers must observe basic rules of social change. Thus the desire to parody, to demean, to blame and to name call can, with older youngsters, be usefully directed toward the creation of verbal lacerations of advertising absurdities and the like which in our culture provide available, appropriate and satisfying targets.

And what about the question of retaining spontaneity of production in the classroom? This is difficult to assess, but the investigator offers anecdotal evidence to support the notion that spontaneity of creation and pleasure in the play remained vital parts of this enterprise. Generally, the groups looked

forward to the sessions. Most children - though not all - were eager to participate in the play sessions and indicated that they perceived these activities as fun. In preparing the inventions for sharing with the entire group, each child had an opportunity to mat his/her invention on construction paper. These, in turn, were put together as class "anthologies." These books became "permanent" additions to the class library and were read again and again by individuals or small groups. Often the investigator kept the collections over the summer and, sometime during the succeeding year, would return them to their rightful classes. Their reappearance was always greeted with much excitement and the desire on nearly everyone's part to reread and reappraise the creations. Interestingly, while "last year's" efforts often receive severe criticism during the elementary years, these books continued to receive much appreciation.

Further Research

This study, like others of children's humorous language, demonstrates the relation between verbal play and explorations of structures of language. What has not received adequate attention are the relations between focus on structures of language and the development of literacy. As Cazden points out, " . . . the hypothesis to be tested is that child's play with language makes one adaptation, literacy, easier to achieve . . . (p. 34).

As demonstrated by the analysis of children's play with ambiguity in language, youngsters in the eight to eleven age range can easily and successfully detect literal interpretations of figurative expressions and incorporate them in their language

play. This "literalness" revealed by these ages is well-known to parents, educators and psychologists. (Gardner and Winner, 1979) The supposition is that children in the middle and/or later elementary years lose their powers of figurative and metaphorical expression so characteristic of the five and six year old. In the researcher's view, what bears examination is whether the predilection for "literalness" in linguistic interpretation represents the efforts of these ages to understand and master semantic ambiguities rather than a loss of capacity for figurative expression.

With parody play, not only did children explore sound/meaning relations of words, but they were also invited to become social critics. The development of a capacity for critical assessment of life experiences has long been a central focus of the education of the elementary ages. The eagerness with which children approach these possibilities of parody play might well generate further explorations of how to expand and integrate such opportunities in elementary programs.

Finally, the significance of a naturalistic study of humorous language such as this one derives from the formulation of an individualized portrait of possibilities for play for a particular school group. Generally, however, the phenomenon of verbal play - long recognized as a hallmark of the verbal rites of passage practiced by the elementary ages - appears to have the potential to infuse language arts programs with a welcome vitality at the same time that it coincides with instructional aims. The next steps in developing this line of inquiry would be for researchers to provide equally individualized portraits of play possibilities with other populations of school children.

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Appendix A: Models for Opportunities

Series #1

The following descriptions come from Amelia Bedelia. They describe the task as posed to Amelia and her interpretation:

Tasks	Amelia's Interpretation
(a) Change the towels in the green bathroom.	A. cuts towels into different shapes.
(b) Dust the furniture.	A. takes box of bath powder and spreads on furniture.
(c) Draw the drapes when the sun comes in.	A. draws a picture of the drapes.
(d) Put the lights out when you finish in the living room.	A. hangs light bulbs on clothes line.
(e) Measure two cups of rice.	A. fills two cups with rice, places one cup on top of another and measures their height with tape measure.
(f) The meat market will deliver a steak and a chicken. Please trim the fat before you put the steak in the icebox.	A. decorates fat with lace and ribbons.
(g) Please dress the chicken.	A. puts socks and shorts on the chicken.

Series #2

In recording the inventions the colon separates the original product name or title placed first. The invention name or title follows:

(a) Devil Dogs: Deviled Frogs (hops right out of your stomach).

(b) Lipton (25 tea bags, the flo-thru bags): Dipton (1000 Sea Bags, the flo-thru bag).

(c) Tropicana Orange Juice (net. wt. 32 fl. oz.): Drop-a-can of Orange Juice (net. wt. 32 fl. spills).

(d) Wash n' Dry: Wash n' Die (22 dies, free knife inside).

(e) Skippy Peanut Butter (creamy, net wt. 8 oz.): Skinny Peanut Butter (crummy, net wt. 1/2 oz.).

(f) Minute Rice: Minute Lice (long skinny type, makes 6 sloppy servings).

(g) Mott's Apple Juice: Mutt's Apple Juice (favorite with dogs everywhere).

(h) Tide Detergent: Tied Detergent (your clothes will be fit to be tied).

(i) Crest Toothpaste: Crust (brush teeth twice a month, garlic flavor, tastes lousy).

The last four examples were commercially produced by a company called Wacky Pack Gum. The gum package included cards which poked fun at nationally advertised products. During their period of popularity the investigator invited the inventor and producer (a parent in the school) to visit some of the classrooms. He brought copies of all the Wacky Packs produced which the writer has kept. Wacky Packs are no longer produced because of lawsuits begun by irate companies targeted by the cards.

Series #3

The models are all TV titles. The investigator felt that this material is almost certain to be within the realm of every child's viewing experience. Movies and magazines have more limited audiences:

(a) The Happy Days: The Crappy Days

(b) The Brady Bunch: The Bratty Bunch

(c) Star Trek: Star Wreck

(d) The Six Million Dollar Man: The Sik Million Dollar Man

(e) TV Guide: TV Died (But it tried, date of birth, Nov. 16, 1946 - date of death, Nov. 17, 1946)

Appendix B: Patterns of Participation for Different Age Groups

Age Group	# of Classes	Dates of Participation Series #1	Series #2	Series #3	# of Children
6-7	3	Spring '75	Spring '74	Spring '78	48
8	2	Spring '75	Spring '78	Spring '78	28
9	3	Spring '79	Spring '78	Fall '74	48
10-11	1	Fall '74	Spring '75	Spring '75	14

Children of groups participating at different ages are these:

--some of the 6-7's class members who responded to Series #2 also responded to Series #1 at age 8.

--some of the 6-7's class members who responded to Series #1 also responded to Series #2 at age 9.

--the class of 8's which responded to Series #2 and #3 also responded to Series #1 at age 9.

There were no cases in which children responded to the same series at different ages.

Appendix C: Tables

Table 1

Adequate/Inadequate Inventions Derived From Play with Ambiguities

Age Group	Total # Inventions	Adequate Inventions	Inadequate Inventions
6-7	67	8 (12%)	59 (88%)
8	66	47 (71%)	19 (29%)
9	65	55 (85%)	10 (15%)
10-11	88	80 (91%)	8 (9%)

Table 2

Distribution of Inventions (Ambiguity) for 8-11's

Ages (Total Responses)	Adequate Types		Inadequate Types		
	poly-semous	homo-phonic	repro-ductions	non-juxta-position	double meanings
6-7 (67)	4	4	28	25	6
8 (66)	44	3	2	9	8
9 (65)	50	6	2	0	7
10-11 (88)	74	6	2	1	5

Table 3

Adequacy/Inadequacy of Parody Inventions

Age Group	Total # Inventions	Adequate Inventions	Inadequate Inventions
6-7	85	57 (67%)	28 (33%)
8	63	52 (83%)	11 (17%)
9	96	81 (84%)	15 (16%)
10-11	65	58 (89%)	7 (11%)

Table 4

Assessment of Incongruity Type

For Adequate Inventions (Parodies)

Age Group	Total # Adequate Inventions	Nonsensical Incongruities	Logical Incongruities
6-7	57	49 (86%)	8 (14%)
8	52	42 (81%)	10 (19%)
9	81	46 (57%)	35 (43%)
10-11	58	25 (43%)	33 (57%)

Appendix D: Figures

Figure A: "The Sik (Sick) Million Dollar Man."
(The children's inventions reproduced in
Appendix D have been spatially reorganized
to fit margin requriements.)

Knight

on

a horse

Figure B. "Knight on a Horse."

Figure C. "Shoplifting."

Figure 5. "Hair and Hare."

Figure E. "Green Tyrant German Style Sauerkraut."